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RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY SCHOOLS.

M. M. KENNEY.

The first school which I remember, though I did not attend it, was in Austin's colony in 1835, and was taught by an Irishman named Cahill. My older brother, aged about eight years, was one of the pupils of that primitive academy, which was distant about two miles from our house, and the way was through the woods without any road or path. When he started to school, our father was absent and mother went with him, carrying a hatchet to blaze the way.

Of the discipline of the school and its studies, I only know that my brother, in relating the experience of several of the boys, made the impression on me that the rod was not spared; and my recollection of the books is reduced to the arithmetic, which I afterwards studied, in which the primitive rules were illustrated by engravings; that for subtraction being a bunch of grapes, showing in successive pictures how, after eating two, three, etc., so many remained. Thinking that this must have been the work of a little boy like myself, I put the lesson into practice by purloining from a basket of "forbidden fruit" and then producing the arithmetic as authority for the appropriation—a sally which mother allowed to condone the little sin.

The next school which I remember, though I did not attend that either, was taught in 1836, at a place called Mt. Vernon, now in Washington county, by Miss Lydia Ann McHenry, a maiden aunt who lived with us. The school was at the house of Mr. Ayers, a public spirited man, who was one of the principal settlers there. I think that Mrs. Ayers and Miss McHenry joined in teaching, and they intended to make it a permanent school, but the war of the revolution interrupted and it was never renewed. I was then four years old. My sister, two years older, attended, and, as it was twenty miles away, was of course absent from home, which left me very lonesome. How long it was I do not know, but it seemed an age, and I had about given her up and ceased to grieve, when one

day as I was playing under a tree before the door I heard my name called and looking up saw aunt and sister alighting from a carriage at the gate. I was so surprised and overjoyed that I cried instead of laughing—the only time I remember shedding “tears of joy;” but had I known the cause of their coming, tears would not have been out of place; it was the news of the fall of the Alamo.

After a perilous delay, father returned from the army to remove his family, and when we crossed the Brazos we heard the drums in Santa Anna’s army at San Felipe.

The next school which I remember was at our own house in 1837. Miss McHenry taught a boarding school for girls and mother at the same time a class of boys. There were in all twenty or more lodged and boarded as best we could in our unfinished cabins in the wilderness. A brave and cheery little company,

“Whom, borne on fancy’s eager wing
Back to the season of life’s joyous spring
I pleased remember.”

If I were a poet I would echo their laughter and portray their plays in a volume which should perpetuate their little history and the fragrance of the primeval wilds would be wafted through its pages.

The studies were of every grade. The pupils were carefully instructed in the art of reading well, and as a help to that end were encouraged to memorize verses, some of which I can still repeat from hearing them recited so long ago. I remember also hearing them recite their grammar and spelling lessons, but of course I could not tell how well. Had the school been sustained so that adequate accommodations could have been provided, it would probably have had a notable influence in the country. But it did not prove financially successful, and after two or three sessions it was discontinued.

I have a vivid recollection of learning the alphabet when I was about four years old, and mother, who was my teacher, also remembered the difficulties of the task. The letter t, of the minor type, was the greatest stumbling block. I called it p, and remember that I thought it was meant for a picture of a pig. The letter s I learned at once, because I thought it was a picture of a snake, and I knew that creature hissed. Men of science gathering data

from ancient monuments of the East, where the childhood of the world is in some measure recorded, and from barbarous tribes where that state continues, have now at last caught up with the former discoveries of the four year olds and announce that the alphabet was originally pictures, which the exigencies of convenience and rapid use had even in very ancient times shortened into conventional signs; the foreign names of the things represented having probably prevented us from observing the same as a familiar fact. If the cultivators of science would study the mental images formed by those original explorers of the world, the three and four year old children, they might find hieroglyphics more significant than any that were ever sculptured on Egyptian obelisk or propylon.

I do not know when I learned to read. Mother attended to that in the very early morning of life, but I could already spell and read very well for a child of seven, when I first went to school. It was taught in an unfinished new school house about two miles from home, to which my brother and I walked every day. The teacher proved inefficient, and after a very brief session the school closed.

The next school was at the same place in 1838 or 1839, taught by Mr. Dyas, an old Irish gentleman, and I think a regular teacher by profession. The session was three or four months and the studies miscellaneous, but the discipline was exact. He had an assortment of switches set in grim array over the great opening where the chimney was to be when the school house should be completed. On one side was the row for little boys, small, straight and elastic, from a kind of tree which furnished Indians with arrows and the schoolmaster with switches at that time. I remember meditating upon the feasibility of destroying all that kind of timber growing near the school house. My terror was a little red switch in that rank which I caught too often, usually for the offense of laughing in school. The larger switches were graded, partly by the size of the boys and partly by the gravity of the offense, the gravest of which was an imperfect lesson. The third size of rods was of hickory; tough sticks, which he did not use on the little boys, but which he did use on the larger scholars, without the least hesitation or reserve, if they failed to get the appointed lesson or were derelict in any of their duties. The fourth size of switches was of oak and would have been better called clubs. These he applied

more in the style of the shillalah than of the ferule to the largest boys. Some of them ran from him, but none ever struck back, it being a point of honor not to strike the teacher, though I sometimes fancied that he looked disappointed that he did not have a more interesting bout with them. I do not remember that he ever whipped any of the girls.

As for the studies, we all had Webster's spelling book, and were ranked and classed according to our proficiency in that great classic. I have forgotten my relative rank at that time, and but few attained the end. The last few pages contained some stories and fables, intended for reading lessons, illustrated with engravings, and the last of these had a picture of a wolf, by some accident well executed—a fact which tended to establish the book in our estimation, because we saw wolves every day. "The picture of the wolf in the spelling book" thus became the synonym of graduation. Whether it originated with us or not I do not know, but the expression was long used in a humorous sense as equivalent to a diploma, and when it was said of a boy that he had studied to "the picture of the wolf in the spelling book" his proficiency was not afterward questioned. The best class in reading used a text-book called "the English Reader," consisting of extracts from the writings of eminent authors, chiefly dry didactics and some poetry. My brother was in that class and also in a class by himself reading Goldsmith's *History of Greece*. The pupils brought such books as they happened to have, and one young man had *Robinson Crusoe* for his reading book. His recitations interested me greatly, but I apprehend that my attention was given to the adventures of *Crusoe* rather than to the teacher's precepts for reading well. Several had *Weem's Life of Washington*, in which the story of the little hatchet and the cherry tree was most impressed upon our memory. It grieves me yet that criticism has thrown doubt on the verity of a story which so successfully impressed children with the honor of veracity. One boy had an illustrated edition of Goldsmith's *Natural History*, and there were a variety of other books, nearly all by famous authors.

We had a variety of arithmetics, and it was during this school that a consignment of new slates and pencils arrived, not enough to go around, but some of the boys got a new outfit. The impression it made on me was one of surprise at the seeming abundance

of the material. From the care which we had to take of our fragments of old slates and stubs of pencils I had somehow imbibed the idea that with their going the world would see the last of the slates; but here, to my relief, I found that the supply would keep up with the forest of switches which I had in mind to extirpate. There were no classes in arithmetic; each boy ciphered through his text-book as fast as he could, and the stern teacher pointed to the errors with the switch held like a pen, and a minatory wag of the head that meant correction. One boy, or young man, for he was nearly grown, persisted in carelessness as to the relative position in which he wrote the figures on his slate, not under each other, in perpendicular lines, with sufficient exactness. After several admonitions Old Dyas attacked one day with one of the shillalah class of switches, but only got in a blow or two before the spry youngster sprang out of a window (there were no shutters, much less glass). But then arose the dilemma that his hat was inside the school house. To come after it was to beard the lion in his den; to go without it was to blister in the sun. After some maneuvering, however, one of the boys threw his hat out of the window, and, pulling it over his ears, he made his escape. He came back, though, in a day or two, in a good humor, and the school went merrily on. I knew this boy as a man for many years after, and, having occasion to go over some calculations with him, I was amused to see that although he neither wrote a good hand nor ciphered well, yet he placed the figures under each other with the precision of a printed book. A few days of Old Dyas in the public schools now would probably eliminate one prolific source of errors.

We walked morning and evening to school, carrying our dinners in tin pails and milk in a variety of bottles. Some had clear glass, some green glass wine bottles, and some black or junk bottles. A contention having arisen among the boys as to the relative strength of these wares, it was submitted to the test of striking the bottles together, the boys whose bottles were broken admitting defeat—which, in some vague way, I thought involved humiliation—while the boys whose bottles survived the conflict vaunted their victories. I do not see why it never occurred to us that the finer ware would suffer in the conflict and the coarser prevail, but so it was. Bottles were of vastly more value then than now, and some of the small boys having cried about their loss, brought in the teacher with his

switches to umpire the game, and he decided to administer impartial fate. I do not remember the number of strokes, but I remember thinking it unjust that the boys who had lost in the game should suffer as much in the award as those who prided themselves on their stock of infrangible glass. For many years, however, I have coincided with the old teacher's view, and wish that his policy could be extended to parties and nations as well, they being but children of a larger growth.

Though the hours of school seemed to me of wearisome length, yet school was turned out time enough for us all to go leisurely home before sundown. Our house was about two miles, most of the way across a prairie, but crossing a small stream, whose clear water babbled over "the stones in the brook" where I loved to play. My brother would sometimes wait with me, but he sat on the bank, very much engaged in his books. I remember his puzzling over the mystery of the extremes and the means in the rule of three, and saying that if he could learn that rule and the square root he would be through the arithmetic and would "know it all." The Robinson Crusoe boy, of whom I have spoken, accompanied us to school, and one day took it into his head to teach us some arithmetic. There were five cows grazing by the side of the path, and he maintained that there were fourteen, proving it in this way: There are four in a bunch on the right and one by itself on the left; four on the right and one on the left make fourteen. We admitted the correctness of the numeration in the abstract, but could not see the cows in the concrete. "Well," said he, "apply your arithmetic; when you buy cattle count the old way, but when you sell cattle numerate them." For some reason this little jest remains in memory, and I have moralized upon it, like Dr. Franklin on his whistle, until at times it seems that the world is divided into two principal classes—those who count in the old way and those who "numerate."

To everything there comes an end, and so at last Dyas' school also ended, and one little scholar at least went running home joyfully carrying his books to stay. The patrons of the school were much pleased with our old teacher and he with his new location. They had arranged for him to open a permanent academy, and he departed for Ireland to bring his family. He sailed from New Orleans, but the vessel was never afterwards heard of.

The next school which I attended was taught in the same place in the year 1840 by Mr. Cummins, a young man from the States—that was as near as I ever learned the country of his nativity. He understood what he taught, and taught what he understood. His discipline was as severe, if not more so, than that of Dyas. I could not compare their teaching, but I learned more, perhaps only because I was older. We were ranked and arrayed in two spelling classes—the senior and the junior; and of course all in Webster's spelling book. I with a few others belonged to both, and it became a consuming ambition with me to be head of both classes, in which I succeeded once or twice, "and then I left it like a child." I have followed many greater ambitions of less importance. We reached and mastered "indivisibility" and unintelligibility, and physisic and phthisic and other long and hard words. Indeed, came at last to the closing lessons, where there was a column of words pronounced alike but spelled differently, the first two of which were "air, the atmosphere; are, plural of am." Now I hear it is considered style to pronounce are arr. They don't know the spelling book; are, should be pronounced air. Further on there was a lesson in punctuation, which Mr. Cummins required us to memorize, giving it in charge on Friday evening; but the words were long and tough, and when Monday morning came, we came up unprepared. Not so the teacher; he did not go after a switch, he already had one and applied it without delay. Beginning at the head of the class, he dusted every jacket in the rank down to the foot and sent us all to our seats to learn it before playtime. We learned it. I can say it yet. There was also a lesson in the same connection, in which the letters of the alphabet occurred in a horizontal line. This lesson, a chum and I thought we could read with facility, and we had planned that when this came to us we would see which could say the a b c's the fastest. I believe he suggested this exploit, and the irony of fate awarded him the lead. He was hardly half way before the teacher was upon him with the switch. The offense was that there was a comma after each letter, indicating a pause. My old school mate is living yet. I hear that he is a preacher. I have not heard him, but will vouch for him that he knows one important lesson not always learned by clergymen, namely, to mind the stops. We got through the lessons on punctuation and read of the old

man and the apple tree, old dog Tray and the rest, and finally passed the picture of the wolf, and so were graduates, if not proficient.

It was at this school that some of Peter Parley's new school books arrived: geography, astronomy, and what not. I was permitted—or required, I forget which—to take lessons in his very primitive astronomy, and in truth was much interested and perhaps vaunted my superior course of study over the other boys. Be that as it may, I came to grief over the constellation of the great bear, which was one of the pictures in the book. In that picture the bear's hind legs bent backwards like those of a dog. There was a pet bear chained at almost every other house, and all the boys knew that a bear's hind legs bent forward like a man's knees, and so they voted my new book the work of an ignorant impostor. Will the makers of books never learn that a false picture is a falsehood?

We were taught arithmetic, whether well or ill, I do not remember; but I do remember that finding our slates growing continually dirty, we thought it a good plan to take them to the creek for a general washing, and once there, the abundance of sand suggested that it was a good scouring material and we proceeded to scour the slates, covering them with marks which we had not calculated upon.

An anecdote is related that somewhere a boy carried his slate to the teacher and asked this deep question, "Where do all the figures go to when they are rubbed out?" I can tell him where our complicated marks and scratches went. They went with the slates to puzzle future antiquaries who may exhume their fragments.

We had a variety of reading books; mine was the National Reader, a compend of extracts from notable modern authors, most of them American. One boy had Aesop's Fables for his text-book, and I was greatly interested in his recitations; so much so that I attempted compositions in the same vein, compositions in which I fear that the adventures of the animals were more in evidence than the moral.

Our games and sports were much the same as now, but we had also adventures with wild animals, some of which were exciting as well as amusing. They should be memorable, though they can not recur in this country until after the next ice age.

Our teacher joined a company of volunteers to invade Mexico, known in history as the Federal Expedition, and their departure

gave us an unexpected holiday. After their return, he stopped at our house, and I hardly recognized the prim and tidy school teacher in the bronzed and war-worn soldier with his grim accoutrements. I listened with eager interest while he told my father of their marches and battles and Xenophonian retreat. Time and experience has not lessened the high opinion I then formed of the military talent of their commander Col. Jordan. Mr. Cummins volunteered in the Texian army to repel the invasion of 1842, and fell at the battle of Salado.

In the fall and winter of 1841 and 1842 another school house materialized as far to the east as the other was to the west, nearly two miles from home. It was a neat log house in a grove in the prairie, with no spring near, but the patrons substituted a well. I had then for the first time to experience a winter school. The house was an improvement on the other, in that it had shutters to windows and door; glass was still far in the future. We had also a chimney and wide fireplace where we kept a roaring log heap in cold weather, when the neighbors brought wood on their wagons, which they did turn about, and a flaming, crackling brush heap when we had to bring fuel by hand from the neighboring woods. The teacher was both competent and qualified mentally, and his scholars advanced well on all lines. Here an innovation broke in, for the world advanced backward and forward then as well as now. The new book was Town's spelling book, with columns of words arranged without the slightest regard to etymology or affinities of orthography, and further obscured by parallel columns of synonyms styled definitions, which we were required to memorize. This fool fad was of course hailed as a great improvement. I have since learned that it returns, like fashions, periodically. It has appeared and disappeared once or twice since.

Our teacher essayed to teach mental arithmetic orally to the school, assembled, as the legislative journals say, "in committee of the whole." The teaching, as it was somewhat violently called, was carried on by sudden questions on this dense subject, which we were expected to answer in the style of an exclamation. He was more successful with his singing geography, where, beginning at Baffin's Bay and going south around the continents of the Western Hemisphere, the names of all the bays were chanted in a unity of discord and loud voices, the pupils following with finger on map

and the chant continuing until the last one had found the bay as well as the name. Then followed the capes, islands, mountains, rivers, etc. There was a certain merit in this system which has not been successfully incorporated in any other. We became familiar with the outlandish proper names in geography, and formed a general idea of their import and locality. It was a sort of game, also, and we took delight in singing to a dull fellow until he found the object and escaped to the winning side, usually taking revenge by joining the screech to the next below until he also escaped. It beat a whipping to make them diligent. In reading, our teacher was fair only, but in penmanship he was excellent and successful, notwithstanding my failure to profit by his precepts and examples. He whipped the children cruelly, and I think more from petulance on his part than fault on theirs, and the girls were not spared. At this school one dark winter evening a neighbor visited us, and after we were dismissed, announced, as a piece of news to carry to our parents, that the Santa Fé expedition had arrived at that place and surrendered without firing a gun. I well remember the shade that passed over the boys' faces at the unwelcome tidings.

In February, 1842, I was taken on a journey to the States, which cut short my attendance; but soon after I left an invasion reached San Antonio; the larger boys went to the war and the school closed.

In the spring of 1843 another school opened in the same place, taught by R. B. Wells, a Methodist minister, who had been sent to our circuit that year. I think he was originally from Georgia, though I am not sure; he may have come from Virginia. Wherever he may have been born and bred, he was a scholar well qualified in every way to teach almost any branch of learning, and withal a gentleman. This school was the first I had seen or heard of that dispensed with the rod in school. He managed to keep order by keeping the children busy and by a dignified and gentle sway; he never had a switch and never needed one; he never whipped and never threatened but once, and that was to some boys or young men as large as himself. Besides the ancient routine of reading, writing, and arithmetic, he had classes in grammar, history, geometry, and surveying, and a class of one, the author of these memoirs, in Latin. He managed to give attention to all and keep the students interested, and I believe that each and every one of them was richly rewarded mentally and morally for the time

and attention given at Wells' school. As a teacher, he had one fault, a very common one then, as now—he did not always begin at the beginning, and knowing the subject so well himself, he could not well discover what the difficulties were which often puzzled primary students. If once he knew what the difficulty was, no man that ever I knew could more easily and quickly lead the pupil out of it, but he was slow in discovering rudimentary difficulties. I remember puzzling over an arithmetical problem for several days; a time which seemed to me months long. The teacher could not, or at least did not, understand my difficulty, which was so simple that a very stupid fellow in the neighborhood easily explained it to me in a few moments; perhaps because he knew how to reach the comprehension of his kind, in which our excellent teacher was at fault—over-shooting as it were. But the more advanced a student became, the more easily and thoroughly did Mr. Wells carry him forward. I remember his lamenting that there was no copy of Euclid to be found in the neighborhood, and when I searched my father's library and found a copy which had been through the wars and moves, and was torn and deficient of some of the first books, he hailed it as a treasure, nor was he in the least put out that the remnant began at the 47th proposition, either because he remembered all that went before or because he did not consider the mere beginning particularly important. And here I digress to move the Text-book Board to re-elect old Euclid for another term of two thousand years, for in all that time no other text-book has appeared that will at all compare with his.

Mr. Wells did not confine his exertions for our advancement to his little school nor to his Gospel ministry, but he also started an emulation among the young men to read well in the works of the great writers of our tongue. My brother read the English translation of Plutarch's Lives and Shakespeare's plays, in the latter of which his taste chose King Henry V., which he almost memorized. A companion of his was the best reader of the English language, except one, that ever I have heard. During that summer I read Scott's Life of Napoleon and attacked Blair's rhetoric, though with problematical success. One of the boys who was not at all literary in his taste, yet mastered the Life of Putnam, and when we found a den of wolves, proposed to emulate his hero by crawling in after them, but we dissuaded him and found a better plan by

smoking them out and shooting as they emerged. We had Parley's Universal History, then a new book, which had many merits in the eyes of a child and not a few in the eyes of this grown person. We had also then, as now, books called "readers intended for the use of schools," among which the English Reader and the National Reader still held first place. The school was in summer time, and during the long hot days the wild cattle came to the grove around the school-house to stamp in the shade. Their bellowing and fighting often monopolized our attention to the annoyance of the teacher, and often serious danger to our horses. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good. It was necessary to drive these cattle away, which was by no means the simple thing it is to drive gentle cattle. We had to go in force, and when the enemy was routed we were apt to become dispersed in pursuit and it took time to rally. We had many plays which I observe are still in vogue with school-boys. But our favorite sport was to ride away at noon for a swim in some shady pool in the neighboring streams, and we all became good swimmers. After the swim, we ran our horses back to the school-house. A level piece of road leading from the school-house suggested a race track, where we tried the speed of our "nags" with merry races, in which the girls rode as well as the boys, and won many equestrian contests. We also had swings for the girls and various athletic exercises for the boys. I believe that we had more sport and genuine enjoyment and at the same time gave more attention to our studies at this school than any other I have known either before or since.

With the close of summer, our school closed, when I was eleven years old. The teacher remained in the neighborhood for some time and wherever he was it seemed as if school was in session from the numbers who came to him for instruction, especially young men. He did not resume his school, but removed to another part of the country, where, years afterward, he closed his useful life. No towering monument with marble piled around marks the tomb of Robert Barnard Wells, but the light which he let shine before men still gleams through the clouds of time.